

CONSTIPATION & HEMORRHOIDS IN PREGNANCY AND AFTER BIRTH

Constipation is a common discomfort during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Constipation occurs when your bowel movements are hard, slow, or infrequent, and it can cause abdominal bloating and pain.

Hemorrhoids are swollen veins inside the rectum or at the anal opening. They are often painful and may cause a small amount of rectal bleeding after bowel movements. Constipation and straining during bowel movements can make hemorrhoids worse. It is important to have soft, daily bowel movements, without straining, to prevent and alleviate hemorrhoids and to protect your pelvic floor (especially postpartum).

Consult your care-provider if you continue to have problems with constipation or hemorrhoids after trying the below remedies.

To alleviate constipation, try some of these remedies:

- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water. Aim for 2-3 litres of water daily.
- Eat plenty of fibre-rich foods like whole grains, bran, dried fruits (especially prunes and figs), vegetables, and whole fruits.
- Eat ground flax seeds or chia seeds (about a tablespoon a day sprinkled on cereal or stirred into water or a smoothie).
- Avoid processed and refined foods like white rice, white bread, pasta, and fast foods, which can be constipating.
- For some people, prenatal vitamins and iron supplements can make constipation worse. If constipation is severe, you can try discontinuing your prenatal vitamins and/or iron supplements, or taking them every other day. If you are less than 12 weeks' pregnant, you should still continue to take folic acid daily, which you can buy separately. Discuss with your care-provider if you are not able to tolerate your prenatal vitamins or iron supplements.

Dietary supplements and medications for constipation:

Many people need to continue taking something like magnesium or a stool softener for many days or even weeks. It can take some time before the bowels become regular or for the dietary changes to do their job.

1. Supplements

- Magnesium citrate
 - The recommended daily dose of magnesium is 200-600mg daily.
 - Magnesium citrate can be consumed in a pill/capsule form, or as a powder stirred into beverages (e.g., *Natural Calm* magnesium powder).
 - Magnesium supplements can also improve sleep quality and alleviate leg cramps and restlessness and anxiety in pregnancy.

- Metamucil
 - Metamucil is another pregnancy-safe supplement that can improve constipation by increasing fibre in the diet. Please note that it is essential to consume Metamucil with lots of fluids, otherwise it can actually make constipation worse.

2. Medications:

If the above suggestions do not work, try using a stool softener. These are available at most pharmacies over the counter and are safe to use during pregnancy and breast/chestfeeding.

- Docusate Sodium
 - Start with one, 100mg softgel tablet for a maximum dose of 3 softgels per day.
- Polyethylene Glycol (PEG) 3350
 - Mix one packet (17g) into a glass of water and drink at bedtime. A common brand is *Restoralax*.

Postpartum constipation tip:

- You may find that gently pressing on your perineum with a clean, warm cloth or compress is comforting when you have your first few bowel movements after giving birth, particularly if you have stitches.

Hemorrhoid relief:

- Hydrocortisone acetate 0.5% / zinc sulfate 0.5% (Anusol HC) rectal ointment is safe for use in pregnancy and postpartum and is available without a prescription. Apply twice daily and after each bowel movement as needed. If this is not effective, ask your care provider about a stronger prescription ointment or suppository.
- Some people find that freezing used, caffeinated tea bags and placing these frozen tea bag 'ice packs' on the hemorrhoid can relieve symptoms. This is because cold and caffeine can both help reduce swelling of blood vessels.
- Compression stockings can improve blood flow to and from the legs and pelvis, relieving discomfort from varicose veins and hemorrhoids. You can ask your care provider for a prescription for prescription-grade compression stockings, which are covered under some benefits plans.